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**The Individualized Education Plan: Involvement and
Satisfaction of the Regular Education Teacher**

BY

Alison Dirksmeyer

THESIS

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FOR THE DEGREE OF

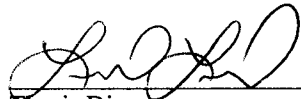
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**The Individualized Education Plan: Involvement and Satisfaction of the Regular
Education Teacher**

Alison Dirksmeyer

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Abstract

A total of 376 general education teachers in grades kindergarten through high school completed a questionnaire about their involvement and satisfaction with the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process. The results from the current study suggest that many regular education teachers are not actively involved or satisfied with the IEP process. For example, less than half of the teachers surveyed indicated that they were completely or actively involved in determining IEP goals and less than one-fifth reported that they felt a major responsibility for helping students in their classroom achieve IEP goals. Many areas of dissatisfaction were also noted in teachers' responses. Although over half of the teachers reported that they had gained at least a little better understanding of the student as a result of attending the IEP meeting, most teachers expressed some concern over the placement decision made, most did not think the school district had the resources to implement the IEP effectively, many indicated that few of their questions about the student had been answered adequately, and over half expressed concern that the IEP goals would not be met during the next school year. Teachers who reported being more satisfied also reported more involvement with the IEP process. In their written responses, teachers indicated that the most positive aspects of the IEP process were related to collaboration and shared decision-making with team members, including other school personnel and parents/guardians. The most frequently written negative comment related to time involvement. Over one-third of teachers mentioned something negative about the amount of time involved in the IEP process or meeting in their written responses. How the present findings relate to previous research on the regular education

teacher's involvement and satisfaction with the IEP process, as well as directions for future research, are discussed.

The Individualized Education Plan: Teacher Involvement and Satisfaction

Prior to 1997, many state special education rules required general education teachers to be a part of the process for developing an individualized education plan (IEP), but the involvement of regular education teachers was not required by federal law until the 1997 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA (National Association of State Directors, of Special Education, NASDSE, 1998).

According to the initial Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), the outcome of Public Law 94-142 that was later revised and amended to become IDEA, the IEP provides administrators with proof that teachers and others involved in the instruction of a student receiving special education services have a formalized plan, that parents have a voice in the process, and that the student is provided with the most appropriate education possible (Smith, 1990). Once the planning team has met and the IEP has been developed for children in the regular classroom, the general education teacher usually has the responsibility of implementing the IEP goals and objectives. Research over the years, however, has indicted that many regular education teachers play a superficial role in the development and implementation of students' IEPs, despite the fact that many students with IEPs continue to be served in the regular classroom.

The National Advisory Committee on the Handicapped (NACH) recognized the importance of regular education teachers in the involvement of the IEP process as early as 1977. At that time, general education teachers rarely attended IEP meetings or otherwise participated in the IEP development process (Rucker & Vautour, 1978). Goldstein, Strickland, Turnbull, and Curry (1980) reported that even though general education teachers had major responsibilities for instruction, they were not actively

involved in the IEP process. An observer was present at 14 IEP meetings and recorded who was speaking at two-minute intervals. Goldstein et al., (1980) reported that a general education teacher was present at 43 percent of the IEP meetings and often expressed themselves differently than special education teachers. For the majority of the meetings, general education teachers discussed their concerns about the child's behavior in their classroom. The majority of the special education teachers' comments, however, focused on curriculum and academic performance.

Other researchers in the 1980s reported limited participation of regular education teachers with the IEP process. In a study by Pugach (1982), regular elementary school teachers who were serving at least one student with an IEP participated in an interview and completed a questionnaire concerning their involvement in the IEP process. Pugach (1982) created the survey as a means to obtain information from teachers about their involvement in the development and utilization of IEPs. The questionnaire consisted of five items requesting demographic information and eleven items requesting specific data related to planning for the instruction of mildly handicapped students (i.e. number of students served, number initially referred by teacher). There were ten questions on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "always" to "never" concerning teacher involvement in IEP development and frequency of utilization of IEPs. Fifty-two percent of teachers reported that they had attended the most recent IEP meeting for a student in their class. The majority of these teachers, however, had not participated in developing the IEP plan even though they had the bulk of the instructional responsibility for that child. This low level of involvement led the researcher to conclude that the IEP does not reflect the contribution of the general education teacher. Pugach also found that the general

education teachers were more likely to attend an IEP meeting if they had made the initial referral for special education services. These teachers also reported that there was a lack of coordination between themselves and the special education teacher. Additionally, Pugach (1982) found that the goals for children in their special education classroom rarely related to the goals in their regular education classroom. Pugach (1982) reported that 52 percent of the general education teachers felt that they would have been more satisfied with the process if they had more time to make initial plans for the meetings and to develop the IEPs with goals that corresponded to the goals of the special education teacher. Additionally, the general education teachers also felt that they needed more time allotted to monitor instructional progress once IEP goals were stated.

Yesseldyke, Algozzine, and Allen (1982) concluded from a study of IEP meetings that when they do attend, regular education teachers participate minimally, typically speaking less than one minute during a meeting. They further concluded that the majority of the teacher participation was superficial because the bulk of teachers' comments (47%) dealt with subjective or irrelevant information. Relevant information was discussed by regular education teachers only ten percent of the time. Gilliam and Coleman (1981) also found that IEP participants ranked regular education teachers low in actual contribution and influence during IEP meetings. These failed or superficial interactions of regular education teachers go against shared decision-making and shared responsibility for students across educational settings as spelled out in IDEA today. This lack of participation by teachers is a concern because increased participation is related to increased general education teacher satisfaction with the IEP process (Menlove, Hudson, and Suter, 2001).

In order for general education teachers to be informed of their roles and responsibilities in the IEP, teachers must have the IEP accessible to them at all times (Regular education teachers as IEP team members, 1999). Pugach (1982) indicated, however, that general education teachers rarely referred to the IEP plans in planning and monitoring the instruction of students. IEPs were most likely to be reviewed before an annual IEP meeting. The researchers also indicated that only 12 percent of the teachers had IEPs on file in their classrooms. Thirty four percent of the teachers stated that the IEP may be a useful document for the special education teacher, but they did not find it useful for themselves. This lack of IEP utilization by the general education teacher is also confirmed in a study by Goldstein, Strickland, Turnbull, and Curry (1980). The study found that of the 43 percent of the general education teachers who attended IEP conferences, none of them referred to or applied the IEP document to their classrooms.

In a study done by Goldstein, Strickland, Turnbull, and Curry (1980), participants of recent IEP meetings completed a follow up questionnaire rating their satisfaction with the meeting. The questionnaire included eight items, which were rated on a scale of one to five, five being identified as "strongly agree" and one being identified as "strongly disagree". The general education teachers had the lowest satisfaction rating on five out of the eight items. The concerns listed by the general education teachers about the IEP meetings included that they did not feel that the IEP meeting had been helpful in planning the student's educational program, they felt the goals set for the child would not be accomplished, they were dissatisfied with the child's placement, the school system was not able to offer the resources needed to effectively implement the IEP, and they had not gained a better understanding of the child. Overall, the results reported by Goldstein et

al. (1980) are similar to those reported by other researchers in the 1980s who reported that general education teachers were unsatisfied with the IEP process.

IDEA 1997 made the participation of general education teachers in the IEP process a federally mandated act and this brought new responsibilities for many teachers across the nation. IDEA defines the role of the general education teacher as an active participant in the development of the IEP. This includes assisting with and determining the most appropriate and positive behavioral interventions for each student. The general education teacher is also responsible for providing the most effective supplementary aids and services, as well as curriculum and program modifications for the student. The regular education teacher is also responsible for providing support to other school personnel assisting the student. Under IDEA, the regular education teacher participates in the review and revision of the IEP of the student (Menlove, Hudson, & Suter, 2001). Because IDEA 1997 views the regular education teacher as responsible for implementing the majority of the IEP for students included in the regular classroom, it is crucial that the regular education teacher be an active participant in discussions about how to best teach the child (Regular education teachers as IEP team members, 1999).

Published research after 1997, however, continued to report low levels of satisfaction and participation with the IEP process for regular education teachers. For instance, a study by Menlove (1999) investigated the satisfaction rates of general education teachers related to the IEP developmental process. Menlove found that only 51 percent of general education teachers regularly attended IEP meetings. General education teachers also reported consistently lower levels of satisfaction with IEP development factors than other IEP team members. Forty-eight percent of these general

education teachers reported not being able to understand the terms and forms used in the IEP meetings, while 47 percent did not deem the paperwork an important part of the IEP process. Thirty-five percent felt that their input during IEP meetings was not valued by the other team members. Overall, 48 percent of the general education teachers did not feel that the IEP enhances student learning (as cited in Menlove, Hudson, and Suter, 2001).

Amount of satisfaction with the IEP process by regular education teachers may be related to grade-level. The Utah Office of Education (as cited in Menlove, et al., 2001) found that elementary teachers had higher overall levels of satisfaction with the IEP process when compared to other general education teachers. This level of satisfaction decreased for general education teachers as the age of students increased, and the lowest level of IEP satisfaction was with high school teachers.

At the elementary, middle, and high school levels, Menlove et al. (2001) reported five main reasons that teachers gave concerning why they did not attend IEP meetings. These general education teachers reported that they did not feel part of the IEP team because their concerns were usually not addressed at the meetings. They also felt that the IEP meetings were directed at the special education teachers, rather than everyone involved. General education teachers also indicated that they did not have enough time to prepare or participate in the IEP process because they felt frustrated with the amount of time required to prepare and attend IEP meetings. They also perceived that the IEP meeting times were geared toward parents and that they would rather attend the meetings during the school day. These teachers also reported that they did not know what to expect in the IEP meetings or what their roles as general education teachers were in the

meetings. The teachers specified this dissatisfaction because they reported that no one talks to them before meetings to go over what will happen and what information to bring. In addition, the teachers felt that the IEP meetings and the IEP plan have virtually no relevance to what students are learning in their classes and that the IEP goals are unrealistic and vague. Overall, these teachers voiced concerns about the IEP plans not addressing problems in the general education classrooms and, therefore, they did not view the plans as applicable to them.

According to Public Law 94-142 and IDEA, beyond the skills necessary to run an efficient IEP meeting, teacher attendance and participation at planning meetings is crucial. The law's intent is not carried out if teachers are not in attendance because without participation of all team members, the intent of the collaborative team approach cannot be fulfilled (Smith, 1990). The importance of shared decisions was suggested as early as 1978 by the National Education Association (NEA). The NEA reported, for instance, that for a child receiving special education services, the special education teacher and general education teacher must discuss the child's placement in order for a proper placement decision to be made. As the previous research cited indicates, these types of discussions may not be occurring.

General education teachers' lack of participation and satisfaction with the IEP process is discouraging because previous research suggests that general education teacher involvement and satisfaction can directly affect the outcome of the IEP meeting. Gilliam and Coleman (1981) and Menlove et al. (2001), for example, concluded that increased participation leads to increased general education teacher satisfaction with the IEP process. Research has consistently shown, however, that

general education teachers take an inactive role during the IEP process. Pugach (1982) found that IEP plans generally do not include input from the general education teacher even though they have that child for the majority of the school day. Previous research has suggested several reasons why teachers are not satisfied with the IEP process. For instance, general education teachers often reported that they felt as if they were not a part of the IEP team, that the IEP meetings and the IEP plan have virtually no relevance to what students are learning in their classes, and that the IEP goals are unrealistic and vague (see Table 1 for a review of relevant research). Teacher involvement and satisfaction with the IEP process is important because general education teachers are a crucial part of implementing effective interventions for student with the IEPs, as well as following the goals established on the IEP (Yesseldyke et al., 1982).

General education teachers' involvement in the development of each student's IEP was an essential factor in the revision of PL94-142 into the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1997. Prior to 1997, researchers concluded that the satisfaction of general education teachers was relatively low. Because inclusion of students with special needs into the regular classroom occurs more and more frequently, the purpose of the present study was to assess general education teachers' involvement and satisfaction in the IEP process today. A questionnaire was used to gather data for a descriptive analysis of general education teachers' level of involvement and satisfaction with the IEP process. It was expected that more exposure to students with special needs has increased the involvement and satisfaction of today's regular education teacher with the IEP process. If teachers' responses indicate that this is not the case, then results from the present study will help highlight areas that need to be addressed to improve the

involvement and satisfaction of today's general education teacher with the individualized education planning process for students in their classroom.

The research questions addressed in this study included (1) How involved and satisfied are general education teachers today with the IEP process? and (2) What are the most positive and negative aspects reported by general education teachers involved in the IEP process?

Method

Participants

Questionnaires were sent out to 1,000 general education teachers who have been involved in the IEP process in 18 school districts in a rural Central Illinois Special Education Cooperative. A total of 376 questionnaires were completed and returned. The second page of Appendix A summarizes the responses of teachers to demographic questions. Of the regular education teachers who responded to the questionnaire, 18 did not indicate what grade they taught. The remaining 358 teachers were about evenly split between those indicating they taught kindergarten through third grade (31%; $n = 113$), middle school and junior high or grades 4 through 8 (36%; $n = 130$) and high school (32%; $n = 115$). When describing their years of teaching experience, 36% ($n = 134$) reported 10 or fewer years, 43% ($n = 160$) checked between 11 and 25 years, and approximately one-fifth (21%; $n = 79$) indicated over 25 years of teaching experience. The teachers were almost evenly divided between those having a bachelors degree (47%; $n = 177$) and those with masters degrees (52%; $n = 195$). In regards to number of hours of inservice training related to IEPs, most teachers (70%; $n = 247$) checked the minimum category of between 0 to 5 hours. The average number of students with IEPs served in a typical school year was 10.98 (range = 1 to 170 students). The mean number of IEP meetings attended by the participants each school year was 7.24 (range was between 1 to 50 meetings).

Materials

The questionnaire of general education teacher involvement and satisfaction with the IEP meeting process was developed based on questionnaires created by Pugach

(1982) and Goldstein et al. (1980). See Appendix A for a copy of the questionnaire. On the questionnaire, teachers were first asked to think of an IEP that they had recently attended and then respond to 13 questions on a two- to five-point Likert scale. The percentage of teachers endorsing each response was calculated.

Questions relating to the involvement of the general education teacher were looked at in items one, two, three, four, five, and twelve. They asked whether the teacher referred the student for special education services, how much information they provided at the meeting, and how often they conferred with special education teachers. Teachers also indicated how involved they were during the whole IEP meeting, how much responsibility they had for determining goals, how responsible they will be for achieving the goals, and if they were given a clear responsibility for helping to achieve the IEP goals. The number and percentage of teachers endorsing each response option to each question was recorded. A total involvement score was also calculated for each teacher by summing responses to involvement-related questions (i.e. questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 12). Selecting the most positive response (e.g., "Completely," "Yes," or "All") for each question was scored as either "5," "3," or "2" depending on the number of response options, and selecting the most negative response for each question (e.g., "No," "None," "Not Involved") was scored as "1." For questions with five or three response options, intermediate responses were scored numerically in ascending order from the most negative response (score of "1") to the most positive response (score of "2," "3," or "5"). For question 1, for example, selecting the response "Never" was scored "1," "Seldom" was scored "2," "Sometimes" was scored "3," "Very Often" was scored "4," and "Frequently" was scored "5."

Questions addressing the general education teachers' satisfaction level with the IEP process were looked at in items six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, and thirteen. Teachers' satisfaction with the student's placement, the school's resources to meet student's needs, and their attendance at the IEP were assessed. Whether or not teachers felt they better understood the student as a result of attending the IEP and whether they felt the IEP goals could be accomplished were also measured. The number and percentage of teachers endorsing each response option for each question was recorded. A total satisfaction score was also calculated for each teacher by summing responses to involvement-related questions (i.e., questions 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 13). The most positive response (e.g., "Completely," "Yes," or "All") for each question was scored as either "5," "3," or "2" depending on the number of response options, and the most negative response for each question (e.g., "No," "None," "Not Involved") was scored as "1." For questions with five or three response options, intermediate responses were scored numerically in ascending order from the most negative response (score of "1") to the most positive response (score of "2," "3," or "5").

Teachers were then questioned about who they felt were the most productive or beneficial members of the IEP team and who was the most essential to developing the IEP. A listing of typical IEP participants (including parent/guardian, advocate, regular education teacher, special education teacher, principal/administrator, speech language pathologist, school psychologist, social worker, occupational therapist, physical therapist, and nurse/other medical professional) were presented and teachers were asked to check all who applied. Teachers could also write in any other participant they felt was the most important during the IEP planning process.

The teachers were asked to respond to two open-ended questions. One question asked teachers to describe the most positive aspect of the IEP conference, and the other question asked teachers about the most negative aspect of the IEP conference.

Finally, demographic or background questions were asked about grade taught, years of teaching experience, certification held, and number of hours of inservice training on IEPs. Teachers also indicated how many students with IEPs they served in a typical year, the number of meetings they usually attend, and who was responsible for completing the IEP forms. (See Appendix A for a copy of this questionnaire).

Procedures

The questionnaires were sent to general education teachers in a rural Central Illinois Special Education Cooperative. The teachers were asked to complete the questionnaire and return it through the mail. To maintain confidentiality, no identifiable information was gathered.

Results

The 376 general education teachers who completed the questionnaire responded to questions that pertained to their involvement and satisfaction with the IEP process. Participants also described the most positive and negative aspects of the IEP process. Additionally, participants reported who they felt were the most productive or beneficial members of the IEP team and who was most essential to developing the IEP. Following the model from studies by Pugach (1982) and Goldstein et al. (1980), descriptive results are presented as the percentage of general education teachers who indicated a given response.

Involvement in the IEP Process

Summaries of teacher responses to the questionnaire are presented in Table 2 and Appendix A. As evident in Table 2, although 76% of teachers indicated that they felt they had at least some responsibility for the achievement of IEP goals, many teachers reported a low level of involvement in the IEP process for students in their classrooms. For instance, most teachers agreed that they did not initially refer the student for special education services (65%) and that they did not suggest support services for the student (53%). When asked how often during the development of the IEP did the regular education teacher confer with the special education teacher regarding the student in their classroom, 44% of the teachers selected "Seldom" or "Never." Less than half of the teachers indicated that they provided some information about the student's current level of performance (48%) or that they were completely or actively involved in determining the goals and objectives for the student (44%).

Correlations between total involvement scores and demographic information about the teachers are presented in Table 3. As the correlation coefficients in Table 3 indicate, highest degree earned by the teachers and number of hours of inservice training on IEPs was not related total involvement scores. Teaching higher grade levels was, however, associated with lower total involvement scores ($r = -.34; p = .000$). Years of teaching experience ($r = .12; p = .025$) and number of IEP meetings the teacher attended every year ($r = .115; p = .026$) were also significantly, but modestly, related to total involvement score.

Satisfaction with IEP Process

Teachers' responses to the satisfaction questions (questions #6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, & 13) are presented in Appendix A and summarized in Table 2. The regular education teachers sampled described several areas of dissatisfaction in their responses. While 85% of teachers indicated that they gained at least a very much better, much better, better, or little better understanding of the student at the IEP meeting, only 8% stated that "most" or "all" of their questions about the student were answered. Only 5% were completely satisfied with the placement decisions made. Many teachers (77%) indicated that their school district could offer few to none of the resources necessary to implement the IEP effectively and they reported serious doubts about the IEP goals being accomplished during the current or next school year (62%). Only 16% reported that all or most of their time at the IEP meeting was well spent, while many (65%) described the IEP committee meeting as only being minimally to not at all helpful in planning the students' educational programs.

Correlations between demographic information and total satisfaction score are presented in Table 3. Current grade level taught, years of teaching experience, highest degrees earned, and number of students with IEPs each year did not correlate significantly with total satisfaction. Small but significant correlations between total satisfaction and number of hours of inservice training on IEPs ($r = .153$; $p = .003$) and the number of IEP meetings attended each year ($r = .126$; $p = .015$) were found. A significant relationship was also found between total satisfaction score and total involvement score ($r = .51$; $p = .000$).

Most Productive Team Members

The second page of Appendix A summarizes the percentage of teachers who endorsed each response about the most productive or beneficial members of the IEP team. When asked who were the most productive members of the IEP team, the most frequently mentioned team members were the special education teacher (by 16% of respondents), parent/guardian (15%), themselves (14%), school psychologist (12%), social worker (10%), other regular education teachers (9%), principal/administrator (9%), and speech-language pathologist (8%). Few teachers indicated that the advocate (2%), occupational therapist (2%), physical therapist (2%) or nurse/medical professional (1%) was the most productive in developing the student's IEP.

Most Essential in Developing IEP

Appendix A also presents the percentage of teachers who checked each response about who was the most essential in the development of the IEP. Overall, the special education teacher was endorsed most frequently (by 41% of the regular education teachers responding) as the most essential for developing the IEP. The next most

essential people for the development of the IEP listed by the regular education teachers were the school psychologist (13%), parent/guardian (10%) and themselves (10%).

Responsible for Completing IEP Forms

On the very last question of the questionnaire, the overwhelming majority of teachers (95%; $n = 305$) indicated that it was the special education teacher who was responsible for completing the IEP forms.

Positive Comments

At the end of the questionnaire were two open-ended questions pertaining to regular education teachers' most positive and negative perceptions of the IEP meeting/process. These questions were adapted from Habing, (2003). After reviewing their responses, six main positive themes were evident. Table 4 summarizes the percentage of regular education teachers who mentioned each positive theme. All positive responses were grouped into the following categories: collaboration with school staff, collaboration with parents (parental input and involvement), knowledge gained about the student (relating to needs of the student), outcome (statement indicated something positive resulted from the meeting), learning experience (learning experience for teacher, staff, and/or parent), and student accountability (holding the student accountable for a portion of their educational experience). As indicated in Table 4, 5% of regular education teachers' comments did not relate to any of the other categories (such as the meeting was short, reviewing old IEP goals, and that there was nothing positive).

The most common positive response written by regular education teachers was that the IEP process allowed for collaboration between school staff members (33%). Some examples of comments under this category were feelings of teamwork, working

together to serve the student, and collaboration of ideas and thoughts from the group.

Nineteen percent of regular education teachers wrote statements about positive collaboration with parents (i.e. parental involvement, working with parents to achieve goals, etc.). Twenty-two percent of the teachers responded with statements that indicated that they learned something as a result of attending IEP meetings (getting to know the student better, gained a better understanding of how to help the student, learned about the student's strengths and weaknesses, etc.). An additional 19% of teachers wrote about the successful outcome of the meeting, (i.e., mentioning that a beneficial plan was developed, the student was provided with necessary accommodations, the child would receive appropriate interventions, etc.). Additionally, 2% of regular education teachers made responses pertaining to student accountability (i.e. student is aware of their responsibility to get homework completed, having the student take ownership of his/her learning, etc.). Finally, 5% of regular education teachers indicated responses that did not fall into any of the designated categories (i.e. the meeting was short, there was nothing positive about the meeting, etc.).

Negative Comments

Regular education teachers were also given the opportunity to describe their most negative perceptions of the IEP meeting/process. The majority of the responses fell into one of the seven main categories: time involvement, lack of cooperation/shared decision making, lack of parental involvement/cooperation, paperwork, unprofessional behaviors or other negative characteristics of team members, lack of training by the regular education teacher, and child's individual needs not being met. Table 5 includes a summary of regular education teachers' negative perceptions of the IEP process.

Thirty-four percent of regular education teachers indicated that the most negative aspect of the IEP process was the time involved (i.e. meetings take too long, length of time between referral and placement, etc.). The lack of cooperation/shared decision-making was the next most commonly written responses, occurring 18% of the time. Examples of comments written for this category were that accommodations and goals were made without the input from regular education teachers, the IEP was already written before the meeting began, and little involvement by any regular education teachers. Whereas, 15% of regular education teachers responded that the most negative aspect of the IEP process was the lack of parental involvement and cooperation (i.e. parents not showing up, parents refusing services, etc.). Some regular education teachers (7%) indicated that the most negative part of the IEP process was the paperwork involved. Examples of responses under this category were that the paperwork is too time consuming and lengthy and meetings are just a paper pushing factory. Three percent of regular education teachers responded with statements that indicated their most negative experiences with the IEP process had to do with unprofessional behaviors or other negative characteristics of team members (i.e. too much talk that is not relevant to the meeting, inappropriate comments made about teachers or the student, etc.). Furthermore, another 3% indicated that the most negative aspect of the IEP process for them was their lack of training (i.e. do not have training in order to make adaptations in classroom, do not have the knowledge to understand terminology, etc.). Lastly, 2% of regular education teachers stated that the child's individual needs not being met was the most negative aspect of the IEP process (i.e. not happy with the student's placement, unrealistic goals, etc.). Seventeen percent of regular education teachers replied with responses that did not

fit into any of the indicated categories. Examples of these responses were that every part of the IEP meeting was negative, and never getting a copy of the IEP.

Discussion

The present study surveyed 376 regular education teachers about their involvement and satisfaction with the IEP process. Due to their responses, the results of this study make several contributions to our understanding of involvement and satisfaction levels of regular education teachers today who are involved in IEP decision-making.

Researchers reported over twenty years ago (e.g., Goldstein, et al., 1980; Pugach, 1982) that regular education teachers were not actively involved in the IEP process. The findings from the present study suggest that little progress has been made in teachers' perceptions of their involvement in planning students' IEPs. For instance, less than half of the teachers surveyed indicated that they were completely or actively involved in determining the IEP goals and objectives for students in their classroom and only 14% checked themselves as being productive or beneficial members of the IEP team. Surprisingly, less than one-fifth of the teachers reported that they felt the most or complete responsibility for helping students in their classrooms achieve IEP goals. This may be because over one-fourth of the teachers described themselves as being minimally or not at all involved in determining students' goals and objectives. Additionally, the higher the grade level taught, the less total involvement teachers reported.

More experience with IEP meetings each year and more years teaching were both related to higher total involvement scores, indicating that experience may be a factor related to teachers' level of involvement. Interestingly, another variable related to experience, having more students who require IEPs in the classroom, was related to lower total involvement scores. Whether this later finding is related to a time constraint or

some other reason is not known. The amount of time involved in IEP planning was the number one negative aspect of the process mentioned by teachers in the present study. Previous researchers have also reported teacher frustration over the amount of time required (Menlove, et al., 2001). Future research could investigate what specific aspects of the IEP experience encourage and discourage more active involvement by regular education teachers in the IEP process.

Almost all of the teachers responding in the present study reported that the special education teacher was responsible for completing the IEP forms and the special education teacher was checked most frequently as the team member most essential in the development of the IEP. How and if this reliance on special education teachers impacts the involvement of regular education teachers in the IEP process also needs to be examined. It may be that regular education teachers will continue to be less actively involved as long as they perceive the special education teacher as responsible for the mechanics of the IEP planning process.

Another possible reason explaining the overall lack of involvement expressed by some teachers in the present study relates to who referred the student for services. In 1982, Pugach reported that general education teachers were more likely to be involved in the goal planning process for students in their classroom if they made the initial referral for special education services. Less than 10 percent of teachers in the present sample indicated that they made the initial referral for special education services and approximately one-fourth reported that it was a joint referral. This lack of initial commitment to the special education process by most of the teachers responding may have also negatively influenced their level of involvement in the IEP process.

In 1980, Goldstein, et al. reported that general education teachers were unsatisfied with their IEP experiences. The most frequent concerns listed by regular education teachers over 25 years ago was that they did not feel the IEP meeting was helpful in planning students' educational programs, they did not feel the goals developed could be accomplished, they were dissatisfied with placement decisions, the school system was not able to offer the resources needed to meet the goals developed, and they had not gained a better understanding of the student. Results from the present study echo many of these earlier areas of dissatisfaction. Most teachers sampled in the present study expressed some concern over the placement decision made, most did not think the school district had the proper resources to implement the IEP effectively, many indicated that few of their questions about the student were answered adequately, and over half expressed concern that the IEP goals would not be met during the next school year. The only results that differed from those presented by Goldstein, et al., in 1980 was that a little over half of the teachers in the present study reported that they had gained at least a little better understanding of the student as a result of attending the IEP meeting and approximately one-fifth described the IEP process as a learning experience about students and/or their specific needs in their written comments.

Similar to involvement scores, time and experience were areas related to teacher satisfaction. For example, over half of the teachers in the present sample indicated that they were not satisfied with how their time was spent at the IEP meeting. Small but significant correlations were also found between total satisfaction scores and number of hours of inservice training on IEPs teachers had attended and with number of IEP meetings attended each year. Other possible background characteristics related to

experience, including years of teaching experience and highest degree earned, were not related to satisfaction scores. Although only three percent of teachers indicated that a lack of training was a negative aspect of the IEP process in their written comments, more experience related directly to IEPs—first-hand attendance at IEP meetings and/or inservice training in IEPs and the needs of special education students—are possible methods to encourage greater teacher satisfaction that could be investigated in the future.

Gilliam and Coleman (1981) and Menlove et al., (2001) concluded that increased participation in the IEP process leads to greater teacher satisfaction. In the present study, a significant relationship was found between overall satisfaction and overall involvement in the IEP process. Teachers who were more satisfied also reported more involvement. Because these results are correlational, causation cannot be inferred. It is not clear based on the present findings if more teacher involvement resulted in more satisfaction with IEP process, if more satisfaction led to greater involvement, or if some third variable influenced the relationship between satisfaction and involvement. The present findings do indicate, however, that more research is needed on what promotes involvement and satisfaction for the regular education teacher with the IEP process.

A positive finding from the present study relates to shared decision-making, an important component of the current Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Unlike reports described by researchers in the past (e.g., Goldstein, et al., 1980; Pugach, 1982), the most frequent positive comments written by regular education teachers in the present sample related to their collaboration with team members, including other school personnel and parents/guardians. Many teachers made statements related to feelings of a “team effort” and how everyone was working together for the best interest of the child.

They also expressed their appreciation to parents for being involved members of the team. Comments such as these are promising and suggest that some regular education teachers have become more comfortable with the shared decision-making component of the IEP process over the years.

Although collaboration between members of the IEP team may have improved over the years, data from the present study also suggest some barriers to the collaboration/shared decision-making partnership. Although over 50% of the regular education teachers mentioned some aspect of shared teaching making as a positive aspect of the IEP process, approximately one-third listed a lack of shared decision-making with other school personnel and/or parents/guardians as the most negative aspect. Several regular education teachers indicated on the questionnaire that they felt accommodations and goals were adopted without their input or even decided before the IEP meeting, so there was no opportunity for them to further contribute to the IEP. These findings are supported by Menlove et al. (2001) whose research suggested that the majority of general education teachers did not feel part of the IEP team because their concerns were not usually addressed at the meetings. When other team members develop goals and objectives prior to the IEP meeting without consulting the regular education teacher, this may give regular education teachers the perception that they are not equally involved members of the shared decision-making team. This could impact both the involvement and satisfaction of the regular education teacher with the overall IEP process.

The most frequently mentioned obstacle to their involvement and satisfaction addressed by regular education teachers in the present study, however, related to the time involved with the IEP process. Over one-third of regular education teachers mentioned

something negative about time in their written responses. Some indicated that either the IEP meeting itself was too time consuming or that the length of time between the referral date and the placement date was an excessively long time lapse. Based on their written responses, regular education teachers were unsatisfied because they felt that the student's needs were not being met fast enough and the time spent away from the rest of the classroom in order to attend IEP meetings was not worth it. Addressing teachers' concerns about time may be one method of improving their overall levels of involvement and satisfaction with the IEP process.

When interpreting the results of this study, several limitations must be considered. The sample was not representative of all regular education teachers in the United States because only regular education teachers from portions of one Midwestern state were surveyed. Secondly, the distribution of the questionnaire was limited to regular education teachers whose school districts were being served by one special education cooperative. It was possible to reach many regular education teachers, but because of this restriction, the sample was limited to only regular education teachers being served by the special education cooperative. Approximately 38% of regular education teachers who received the questionnaire responded. Background information that may be pertinent to why regular education teachers did not respond is unknown. For example, it is not known if regular education teachers who were not as satisfied with the IEP process were more or less likely to reply. Because of these limitations, the regular education teachers who did respond may not be the most representative sample of all regular education teachers who participate in the IEP process.

Despite the above mentioned limitations, the results from the present study do provide information about the involvement and satisfaction of today's regular education teachers with the IEP planning process. Further areas of inquiry were also identified.

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Table 1. Summarization of previous research

Author(s)	Date	Results Found
National Education Association	1978	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The special education teacher and general education teacher must discuss the child's placement in order for a proper placement decision to be made.
Rucker & Vautour	1978	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The National Advisory Committee on the Handicapped (NACH) recognized the importance of regular education teachers in the involvement of the IEP process as early as 1977. ▪ At that time, general education teachers rarely attended IEP meetings or otherwise participated in the IEP development process.
Goldstein, Strickland, Turnbull, & Curry	1980	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Even though general education teachers had major responsibilities for instruction, they were not actively involved in the IEP process. ▪ General education teachers were present at 43% of the IEP meetings. ▪ Out of the 43 % of the general education teachers who attended IEP conferences, none of them referred to or applied the IEP document to their classrooms. ▪ General education teachers did not feel that the IEP meeting had been helpful in planning the student's educational program, they felt the goals set for the child would not be accomplished, they were dissatisfied with the child's placement, the school system was not able to offer the resources needed to effectively implement the IEP, and they had not gained a better understanding of the child.
Gilliam & Coleman	1981	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ IEP participants ranked regular education teachers low in actual contribution and influence during IEP meetings.
Pugach	1982	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 52% of teachers attended the most recent IEP meeting for a student in their class. The majority of these teachers had not participated in developing the IEP plan even though they had the bulk of the instructional responsibility for that child. The researcher concluded that the IEP does not reflect the contribution of the general education teacher. ▪ General education teachers were more likely to attend an IEP meeting if they had made the initial referral for special education services. ▪ Goals for children in their special education classroom rarely related to the goals in their regular education classroom. ▪ General education teachers rarely referred to the IEP plans in planning and monitoring the instruction of students.

Yesseldyke, Algozzine, & Allen	1982	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regular education teachers participated minimally, typically speaking less than one minute during a meeting. ▪ The majority of teacher participation was superficial, the bulk of teachers' comments (47%) dealt with subjective or irrelevant information. Relevant information was discussed by regular education teachers only 10% of the time.
Menlove	1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Only 51% of general education teachers regularly attended IEP meetings. ▪ General education teachers reported lower levels of satisfaction with IEP development factors than other IEP team members. ▪ 48% of these general education teachers reported not being able to understand the terms and forms used in the IEP meetings. ▪ 47% did not deem the paperwork an important part of the IEP process. ▪ 35% felt that their input during IEP meetings was not valued by the other team members. ▪ 48% of the general education teachers did not feel that IEP enhanced student learning.
Menlove, Hudson, & Suter	2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased participation by general education teachers leads to increased general education teacher satisfaction with the IEP process. ▪ Elementary teachers had higher overall levels of satisfaction with the IEP process when compared to other general education teachers. ▪ This level of satisfaction decreased for general education teachers as the age of students increased, and the lowest level of IEP satisfaction was with high school teachers. ▪ Teachers felt that the IEP meetings and the IEP plan have virtually no relevance to what students are learning in their classes and that the IEP goals are unrealistic and vague.

Table 2. Percentage of regular education teachers responding to questionnaire

Percentage of Regular Education Teachers Responding on Questionnaire about IEP Experiences

75% or more teachers agreed:

- Gained at least a little better understanding of the student at the IEP meeting (85%)
- Not at all or minimally satisfied with the placement decision (80%)
- School system could offer none or few of the proper resources to implement the IEP effectively (77%)
- Few or none of their questions concerning the student were answered (76%)
- Had at least some responsibility for helping to achieve the IEP goals (76%)

50% to 74% of teachers agreed:

- Did not initially refer the student for special education services (65%)
- IEP committee meeting was minimally or not helpful in planning the student's educational program (65%)
- IEP goals set for the student could not be accomplished during the current or next school year (62%)
- Their time was minimally or not well spent at the IEP meeting (58%)
- Did not suggest support services for the student (53%)

Less than 50% of teachers agreed they:

- Provided some information on current levels of the student's performance (48%)
- Seldom or never conferred with the special education teacher regarding the student (44%)
- Were completely or actively involved with determining goals and objectives for the student (44%)

Table 3. Correlations

Correlations Between Demographic Information and Total Involvement Scores and Total Satisfaction Scores		
<u>Total Involvement</u>	<u>Total Satisfaction</u>	
<u>Grade Taught</u>	-.34* (.000)	-.086 (.095)
<u>Years of Teaching Experience</u>	.12* (.025)	.005 (.93)
<u>Highest Degree Earned</u>	.05 (.34)	.054 (.29)
<u>Amount of Inservice Training</u>	.095 (.066)	.153* (.003)
<u>Number of Students with IEPs</u>	-.174* (.001)	.03 (.56)
<u>IEP Meetings Attended Each Year</u>	.115* (.026)	.126* (.015)
<u>Total Involvement Score</u>		.51* (.000)

Note:*p* values in parentheses (2-tailed).

Table 4. Positive comments

Positive Responses Grouped Into Themes

COLLABORATION WITH SCHOOL STAFF (33%)

- Teachers collaborate with parents in order to find solutions
- Meeting all the people that serve the child
- Hearing other's ideas on how to better serve the student
- Several people coming together to help the student
- Feeling like I am part of a team
- Interaction with all members of the team
- Everyone is willing to work in the best interest of the student
- Being able to work closely with many other teachers to help the student
- Communication among all present
- The feeling that we are all working together to serve the student
- A team effort
- Determining how we can work together to help the student succeed
- The collaborative ideas and thoughts form the group to address what needs and developmental process would be best for a student's behalf and educational goals

LEARNING EXPERIENCE (22%)

- Getting to know the student better
- Putting the student into context
- Finding out the child's strengths and weaknesses
- More insight into the needs of the student
- Learning more about the student's abilities
- Knowledge gained about accommodations
- Finding out specific needs of the student
- Gaining a better understanding of how to help the student
- Understanding the student's strengths and weakness and how those play into the development of IEP goals

COLLABORATION WITH PARENTS (19%)

- Meeting the parents
- Parental involvement
- Chance for parents to share their experiences
- Parents cooperating with school staff
- Working with the parent to achieve the correct placement for their child
- Parent's open communication
- Parent sharing their viewpoint

POSITIVE OUTCOME (19%)

- Successful outcome for the student
- Beneficial plan for student to achieve success
- The outcome has a positive affect on the student
- Proper placement of student
- Knowing the student will get the help needed
- Getting the child additional help to be successful
- Providing what is needed for the child to succeed

OPPORTUNITY TO HELP THE STUDENT (6%)

- Giving the student accommodations
- Knowing the student will get the help needed
- Getting the child additional help to be successful
- Providing what is needed for the child to succeed

OTHER (5%)

- There was nothing positive
- The meeting was short
- Reviewing old IEP goals

STUDENT ACCOUNTABILITY (2%)

- Students is aware of their responsibility to get homework completed on time and come in for extra help
- Having the student take ownership for their learning
- Student knows that they have responsibilities towards their own education

Table 5. Negative comments

Negative Responses Grouped Into Themes

TIME INVOLVEMENT (34%)

- Meetings take too long
- Length of time between referral and placement
- Takes time away from other children in class
- Takes too long for student to get tested
- Time spent out of classroom for meetings
- Before and after school meetings
- Too much wasted time
- Takes too long to organize and attend meetings

LACK OF COOPERATION/SHARED DECISION MAKING (18%)

- Accommodations are adopted against teacher's recommendations
- The IEP was already written before the meeting began, there was no input from teachers
- Placement decision was predetermined, did not feel it was a team decision
- Merely a body in a chair, had no say in goals
- Teacher and administration not showing up
- Little involvement by any regular education teachers

OTHER (17%)

- Every part of the meeting was negative
- Threatening environment for teachers and parents
- Talking about student's weaknesses in front of parents
- Put too much effort and resources into special education students that others get practically nothing in comparison
- Never getting a copy of the IEP

LACK OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT/COOPERATION (15%)

- Parent's not showing up
- Parents talk about what they will do, but then there is not follow through
- Lack of parental cooperation
- Opposition from parents
- Parents refuse to do what is best for the student
- Little input from parents

PAPERWORK (7%)

- The paperwork is too time consuming
- Lengthy and extensive paperwork
- Meetings are a paper pushing factory
- More concern by team members to get signatures on paperwork than on needs of the student

UNPROFESSIONAL BEHAVIORS OR OTHER NEGATIVE CHARACTERICS OF TEAM MEMBERS (3%)

- Too much talk that is not relevant to meeting
- Negative comments made about teachers not present
- Inappropriate comments about student's home life
- Inability of some professionals to communicate in a friendly manner
- Administration leaving in the middle of meetings

LACK OF TRAINING (3%)

- Do not have the training for adaptations in my classroom
- Do not have the knowledge to understand medical, legal, or testing terminology
- Teacher not trained in the area of the student's disability
- Frustration due to lack of training

CHILD'S INDIVIDUAL NEEDS ARE NOT BEING MET (2%)

- Placement
- Unrealistic goals
- Counseling goals not being met

Appendix A

Information Regarding the IEP Process and Meeting Questionnaire Items

Think of an IEP you recently attended and answer the following questions by circling a response:

1. How often during the development of the IEP did you confer with special education teachers regarding the student in your classroom?

Frequently (6%) **Very Often** (19%) Sometimes (31%) Seldom (25%) Never (19%)

2. At the IEP meeting, how much information on current levels of the student's performance did you provide?

All (2%) **Most** (6%) Some (48%) Little (30%) None (14%)

3. How involved were you with determining goals and objectives for the student?

Completely (14%) **Actively** (30%) Partially (28%) Minimally (22%) Not involved (6%)

4. Did you initially refer the student for special education services?

Yes (9%) No (65%) It was a joint referral (26%)

5. Did you suggest support services for the student?

Yes (47%) No (53%)

6. How helpful was the IEP committee meeting in planning the student's educational program?

Very helpful (3%) Helpful (12%) Somewhat helpful (20%) Minimally (39%) Not helpful (26%)

7. How many of the goals set for the student could be accomplished during the current or next school year?

All (1%) **Most** (3%) Some (35%) Few (46%) None (16%)

8. How many of your questions concerning the student were answered at the committee meeting?

All (2%) **Most** (6%) Some (16%) Few (47%) None (29%)

9. How satisfied were you with the placement decision?

Completely (2%) **Mostly** (3%) Somewhat (15%) Minimally (45%) Not at all (35%)

10. How many resources can the school system offer to implement the IEP effectively?

All (1%) **Most** (3%) Some (19%) Few (45%) None (32%)

11. How much of a better understanding of the student did you gain at the IEP meeting?

Very much better (4%) Much better (16%) Better (36%) Little better (29%) Not better (15%)

12. How much responsibility did you feel at the end of the IEP meeting for helping to achieve the IEP goals?

Complete (4%) Most (15%) Some (57%) Little (15%) None (9%)

13. Did you feel that your time at the meeting was well spent?

Completely (5%) **Mostly** (11%) Somewhat (26%) Minimally (40%) Not well spent (18%)

IEP: Involvement and Satisfaction of the Regular Education Teacher 43

- Check all that were productive or beneficial members of the IEP team:

<input type="checkbox"/> Parent/Guardian (15%)	<input type="checkbox"/> School Psychologist (12%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Advocate (2%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Social Worker (10%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Yourself (14%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Occupational Therapist (2%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Other Regular Education Teachers (9%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Physical Therapist (2%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Special Education Teacher (16%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Nurse/Other medical professional (1%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Principal/Administrator (9%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please list)_____ (1%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Speech Language Pathologist (8%)	

- Check who was the most essential to developing the IEP:

<input type="checkbox"/> Parent/Guardian (10%)	<input type="checkbox"/> School Psychologist (13%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Advocate (1%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Social Worker (5%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Yourself (10%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Occupational Therapist (1%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Other Regular Education Teachers (5%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Physical Therapist (1%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Special Education Teacher (41%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Nurse/Other medical professional (1%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Principal/Administrator (3%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please list)_____ (2%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Speech Language Pathologist (7%)	

- What was the most positive aspect of the IEP conference?

- What was the most negative aspect of the IEP process?

- Grade you teach: Kindergarten =(34) 1 =(28) 2 =(20) 3 =(31) 4 =(27) 5 =(17) 6 =(31)
7 =(30) 8 =(25) High School =(115) No Response =(18)

- Years of teaching experience: 0-5 =(61) 6-10 =(73) 11-15 =(64) 16-20 =(51)
21-25 =(45) over 25 years =(79) No Response =(3)

- Type of certification held: _____

- Highest degree earned: Bachelors =(177) Masters =(195) PhD =(1) Other =(1)
No Response =(2)

- Amount of inservice training related to IEPs: 0-5 =(247) 6-10 =(62) 11-15 =(13)
16-20 =(8) over 20 hours =(25) No Response =(21)

- Number of students with IEPs served in a typical school year: (Average = 10.98)

- Number of IEP meetings you attend each school year: (Average = 7.24)

- Who was responsible for completing IEP forms? Special Education Teacher =(305)
School Psychologist =(7) Other =(8) No Response =(56)

Appendix B

Dear Teacher,

I am a graduate student at Eastern Illinois University seeking my Specialist Degree in School Psychology. As part of my thesis project, I am conducting a survey on general education teacher involvement in the IEP (Individualized Education Plan) planning and process. You have been selected at random as someone who has attended an IEP meeting. All information reported by you will be anonymous and confidential.

I hope you will take a few minutes of your time to complete the questionnaire and return it in the enclosed envelope. There has been little recent research asking general education teachers about their involvement and thoughts about the IEP process. Your participation in this study will help researchers further understand general education teachers' perception of the IEP meeting. By completing the questionnaire, you will give your consent to participate in the present research project. Your participation in this research is completely voluntary.

If you would like a summary of the findings from this study, please indicate so that the bottom of this letter.

If you have any questions, please contact either me, Alison (Swango) Dirksmeyer, at (217) 254-0976 or Dr. Linda Leal, Psychology Department at Eastern Illinois University, at (217) 581-2158.

Thank you for your time.

Alison Swango Dirksmeyer

Please cut off and return if you would like a summary of the results of this research project (available Spring 2006). You may also contact Alison Dirksmeyer or Dr. Linda Leal.

Name: _____

Address: _____
